

Draft General Management Plan/ Environmental Impact Statement May 2004

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Crater Lake National Park
Oregon





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Draft
General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement

Crater Lake National Park
Klamath, Jackson, and Douglas Counties, Oregon

Crater Lake National Park was authorized by an act of Congress on May 22, 1902 (Public Law 32 Stat. 20). The last comprehensive management plan for the park was completed in 1977. Much has changed since 1977 — visitor use patterns and demographics have changed, there are new demands for various recreational experiences and activities, and 22,400 acres were added to the park. Each of these changes has implications for how visitors access and use the national park and the facilities needed to support those uses, how resources are managed, and how the National Park Service manages its operations. A new plan is needed.

This document examines four alternatives for managing the national park for the next 15 to 20 years. It also analyzes the impacts of implementing each of the alternatives. The “no-action” alternative, alternative 1 describes the existing conditions and trends of park management and serves as a basis for comparison in evaluating the other alternatives. The emphasis of alternative 2 would be on increased opportunities in recreational diversity and resource education. Under alternative 3 visitors would experience a greater range of natural and cultural resources through recreational opportunities and education. The focus of alternative 4 would be on preservation and restoration of natural processes. Alternative 2 is the National Park Service’s preferred alternative.

Impacts resulting from the no-action alternative would be negligible to minor on natural resources, park operations, and concession operations, with no adverse impact on most cultural resources. Under alternative 2 there would generally be moderate to major beneficial impacts. Impacts from alternative 3 would be beneficial, except for possible adverse impacts on concession operations. Alternative 4 would offer moderate beneficial impacts to natural and cultural resources, with a moderate, adverse impact on visitor use.

This *Draft General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement* has been distributed to other agencies and interested organizations and individuals for their review and comment. The public comment period for this document will last for 60 days after the EPA’s notice of availability has been published in the *Federal Register*.

HOW TO COMMENT ON THIS PLAN

If you wish to respond to the material in this document you may submit your comments, with your name and address, by any one of several methods. You may mail written comments to:

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You may also email comments to the following address: CRLA-GMP@nps.gov. Include your name and return address in your Internet message, and if possible, request a return receipt. You may also email directly to terri_urbanowski@nps.gov.

You may hand-deliver comments to Crater Lake National Park headquarters in the park.

Our practice is to make comments, including names and addresses of respondents, available for public review during regular business hours. Individual respondents may request that we withhold their address from the planning record, which we will honor to the extent allowable by law. There also may be circumstances in which we will withhold from the record a respondent's identity, as allowable by law. If you wish us to withhold your name and/or address, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comment. We will make all submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representative or officials of organizations or business, available for public inspection in their entirety.

This method for public comment submittal listed above stems from court rulings concerning the release of public comments, and it is included as recommended by the Office of the Solicitor, Department of the Interior (DOI).

SUMMARY

The purpose of this *Draft General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement* for Crater Lake National Park is to present a direction for resource preservation and visitor use and a basic foundation for decision making for the park for the next 15 to 20 years. The general management plan provides a comprehensive direction for managing resource activities, visitor activities, and development that would be appropriate at the park in the future.

An important element in determining the desired resource and visitor experience conditions for the park has been public participation. Many issues and concerns were identified by the general public and NPS staff as part of the initial planning efforts, and comments were solicited at public meetings, in planning newsletters, and on the internet.

Once public input was received the planning team identified four alternatives for managing the park—a no-action and three action alternatives, including the preferred alternative. The plan also analyzes and presents the environmental and socioeconomic impacts or consequences of implementing each of those alternatives—the environmental impact statement part of this document. A summary of the alternatives and the important impacts is given below.

ALTERNATIVE 1 – NO ACTION

Description

The no-action alternative represents continuation of the current management direction and approach at the park. It is a way of evaluating the proposed actions of the other three alternatives.

Under the no-action alternative, archeological and ethnographic resources in the park would continue to be surveyed, inventoried, and evaluated as National Park Service staff and funding permitted. Natural resource management protection, preservation, and restoration activities would also continue as staffing and funding allowed.

Existing buildings and facilities in the park would remain; some historic structures would be adaptively used. Munson Valley would continue to serve as the center of NPS administration, maintenance, and housing.

The existing road access and circulation system within the park would continue, and visitor recreational opportunities and interpretive programs in the park would continue.

Impacts

Impacts resulting from the no-action alternative would be negligible to minor on natural resources, park operations, and concession operations. Most cultural resources, archeological sites, cultural landscapes, ethnographic resources, or museum collections would have no adverse impacts. Rehabilitation of the superintendent's residence would result in minor adverse impacts due to some loss of historic fabric. However, adaptive use of the structure as a science and learning center would ensure its long-term preservation and therefore provide a moderate beneficial impact.

Visitor access, recreational and educational opportunities, and visitor facilities and services would remain relatively unchanged, and the park would continue

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to be an important visitor attraction, contributing to the tourism industry in the region. However, potential increases in visitation over the life of the plan could impact the ability to access some areas of the park and enjoy those areas in relative solitude and tranquility.

ALTERNATIVE 2 (PREFERRED) – EMPHASIS ON INCREASED OPPORTUNITIES

Description

Management of the park would emphasize increased opportunities for recreational diversity and research and education. Most recreational opportunities would remain, but new opportunities along Rim Drive would allow visitors to directly experience the primary resource of Crater Lake in ways other than driving. Any new uses around the rim would be nonmotorized and low impact. Opportunities to experience the lake by hiking and biking in a quieter setting would be explored by experimental seasonal road closures of East Rim Drive. Other frontcountry opportunities, such as short trails and picnic areas, would be along the roadways. These new opportunities would provide transitional experiences between the developed areas (or transportations corridors) and the backcountry and also provide for enhanced interpretation, new research, and access the backcountry. Winter snowmobile and snowcoach access would remain along North Junction to the rim.

Research and educational opportunities would be enhanced. A new science and learning center would form the core of the new research. The park would expand and encourage partnerships with universities, scientists, and educational groups. The information gathered would be

disseminated throughout the park to rangers, interpretive staff, and visitors. As a result, special in-depth tours would be available to interest groups such as birdwatchers or geology clubs.

As described under the no-action alternative, existing buildings and facilities in the park would remain, but some structures would be adaptively used.

Current and future needs for office and administrative space would be accommodated without additional construction. Administrative and other organizational functions, which are not by necessity park-based, would be moved to surrounding communities as demand for space within the park increased.

Parking and road congestion at the park would be managed by improving existing pullouts, parking areas, and overlooks. If, in the future, crowding conditions developed, shuttles and other alternative transportation systems would be used to solve the problems, rather than expanding road and parking capacities.

Impacts

This alternative increases visitor opportunities for recreation, education and interpretation, and access to park facilities and services, creating major beneficial impacts on the visitor experience.

Impacts on cultural resources, including the superintendent's house, would be the same as the no-action alternative, with the exception of museum collections, which would have minor to moderate, long-term benefits.

Greater emphasis on research, partnering, and visitor education would also indirectly

promote moderate beneficial effects on biotic communities and could result in some adverse impacts on some threatened and endangered species.

As in alternative 1, some benefits would result from reconfiguration of Rim Village and adaptive reuse of existing buildings. However, under alternative 2, increasing staffing and moving some functions out of the park to nearby communities would result in beneficial impacts on park operations and on the local economy. Although the impact regionally would be negligible, the park would continue to be an important visitor attraction and contribute to the tourism industry in the three-county region. Alternative 2 is the environmentally preferred alternative as evaluated according to the National Environmental Policy Act.

ALTERNATIVE 3 – EMPHASIS ON ENJOYMENT OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Description

The emphasis of this alternative would be to allow visitors to experience a greater range of natural and cultural resources significant and unique to the park through recreational opportunities and education. A wider range of visitor experiences would reach out to greater diversity of visitor groups. Recreational programs, which would focus on minimizing impact, would provide the focus for interpretation and education.

Resources would be managed to permit recreation while protecting the resources. Opportunities for recreation would be viewed in a regional context, where the park could serve as a source of information for regional recreational opportunities. Winter access would be

improved by grooming along North Junction Road. During the summer season use of a shuttle bus system would be explored.

Use of most current facilities would continue. Treatment of historic structures and cultural landscapes would be similar to the no-action alternative, although such resources could be affected by construction of additional trails, installation of new interpretive signs and other media, and expanded tour programs under alternative 3.

Adequate space in an onsite facility would be provided for the curation and storage of the park's museum collections .

Impacts

This alternative's emphasis on increasing the diversity of visitor experience would create major beneficial impacts on the visitor experience. The shift toward a diverse visitor program also would decrease the range of interpretive programs, resulting in a moderate adverse impact on those preferring interpretive programs over experience.

Impacts on cultural resources would be the same as alternative 2.

Actions resulting from this alternative would result in some adverse impacts on some threatened and endangered species or biotic communities.

As described under alternative 2, the reconfiguration of Rim Village, adaptive reuse of existing buildings, increased staffing, and moving some functions outside the park would result in beneficial impacts. The park also would continue to be an important visitor attraction and

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contribute to the tourism industry in the three-county region.

ALTERNATIVE 4 – EMPHASIS ON PRESERVATION AND RESTORATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Description

Park management would be focused on the preservation of native species and natural processes and the restoration of biodiversity and natural processes where altered. The park would be an active partner in a regional conservation strategy that would include other agencies and environmental groups. Most park operations and visitor contact facilities would be outside the park and shared with other agencies and communities.

Resource preservation and restoration would be the overriding consideration in the park. Areas that have been altered would be restored to their natural conditions. Cultural resources would be preserved at the highest level possible. Museum collections would be increased but would be stored in an offsite facility that met professional and National Park Service museum standards.

The visitor experience would stress activities that have low environmental impacts on and are harmonious with the resources. More emphasis would be placed on self-guided and discovery education, and interpretive programs would focus on stewardship.

Vehicular transportation would be altered to reinforce the visitor experience. The Rim Road would be closed between

Cleetwood Cove and Kerr Notch. Winter use of the park would change to allow natural processes to proceed with less disturbance than current management practices allow. Winter plowing of the road to the rim would stop, except for spring opening. Snowmobiling along North Junction Road would no longer be allowed.

Facilities that are not historic and not essential to park functions would be removed and the area rehabilitated. Functions that are, by necessity park-based, would be retained in the park.

Impacts

Impacts resulting from this alternative would include overall beneficial impacts to natural and cultural resources. The decrease in diversity of opportunities, accessibility, and number of interpretive programs would have a moderate adverse impact on the visitor experience.

A decrease in buildings and facilities in the park, along with reduced winter operations, would have moderate beneficial impacts on park operations. The addition of a shuttle and snowcoach would result in moderate, long-term, adverse impacts on concession operations.

Moving operations out of the park would have a beneficial impact on the local economy. Although the impact regionally would be negligible, the park would continue to be an important visitor attraction and contribute to the tourism industry in the three-county region.

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